

JEWISH SURNAMES THROUGH THE AGES

An Etymological History

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A man's name is not like a cloak that merely hangs about him and that one may safely twitch and pull, but a perfectly fitting garment that, like the skin, envelops him so tightly one cannot scratch or scrape it without injuring the man himself.—Goethe

AN ETYMOLOGICAL study of family names runs into much thornier territory than a survey of personal names like the one I undertook in these pages last year ("Jewish First Names Through the Ages," November 1955). Some Jewish surnames, of course, are quite easy to trace. For example, a name found among Sephardic Jews—Moshiach (Messiah)—originally signified a zealous follower of Sabbatai Zvi, the false Messiah who very nearly succeeded in imposing himself on Israel in the 17th century. Similarly, Cohen and Levy are direct transliterations of Hebrew words that make it clear that the one is a man of priestly lineage, and the other a Jew of Levitic extraction.

But in general, surnames are infinitely more various than personal names, having been culled from more diverse sources, having undergone more changes of form, and having come from many more different languages. Surnames are not, in any case, as "standardized" as first names. We feel freer to touch them up, trim or change them

altogether. This is why the origins of many of them are lost in obscurity. Even where a name survives in its original form we may have trouble—as with those which derive from abbreviations whose meaning was once clear but which cannot now be deciphered with certainty.

At the beginning of the Biblical period, Jews, like all members of ancient societies, had no surnames of any kind. Men were known simply as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and so forth. But as the patriarchal families swelled into tribes, more definite identifications were deemed necessary, and patronymics began to be used: a man was designated as X *ben* (son of) Y. Thus we find: Joshua ben Nun, Caleb ben Yefuneh, Palti ben Raphu, and so on. The patronymic is the form of many surnames extant today, both among Jews and non-Jews: Jameson, Johnson, Jackson, Abramson, Mendelson.

In the later period covered by the books of Judges and Kings we find places of origin being employed to identify individuals more closely: Doeg the Edomite, Uriah the Hittite, Elijah the Tishbite, etc., etc. At the time of the return from Babylon under Ezra we come upon several descriptive and adjectival personal names with a definite article. These, to be sure, occur only rarely, but they supply interesting examples of personal names that at the same time serve very nearly as surnames: Ha-kotz (the thorn) in Ezra 2:61; Ha-katan (the little one) in Ezra 8:12; Ha-lohesh (the enchanter) in Nehemiah 3:12. This form probably constitutes the transition to the more definite types of surnames which make their appearance in the Talmudic period.

The Biblical style of nomenclature persisted through Talmudic times, but with

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several innovations. Patronymics are quite prevalent in the Talmud: Jochanan ben Zakkai, Joshua ben Chananiah, Simon ben Gamliel. But since various individuals might bear the same personal *and* patronymic names, it was occasionally necessary to base a surname on other family relationships. Thus we get Raba *bar bar* Chana (Raba the grandson of Chana), Levi the son-in-law of Zachariah, Chama the father of Hoshaya, Tachlifa the father-in-law of Abahu, and so on.

Places of origin continued to be used as surnames in Talmudic times: Nahum the Mede, Nahum of Gimso, Todos of Rome, Levites of Yabne, Hillel the Babylonian, Jose the Galilean. (Judas) Iscariot and (Mary) Magdalene in the New Testament are likewise place names, the former being Judas *ish Krioth*, "the man of Krioth"; the latter, Miriam of Magdela.

It is in the Talmudic era that priestly origin first accounts for surnames: Ishmael the High Priest; Jose *Ha-kohen* (the priest); Chanina the Chief of the Priests (*s'gan ha-kohanim*). At least one surname of the same period came from position in the family: Taboth *Rishba* which signifies "chief of the family."

Men also earned surnames: Samuel the Astronomer; Chanina *Kara* (the Bible teacher); Chutzpith the Interpreter or Translator (*ha-m'turgemon*); Ephraim *Safra* (the scribe), and so on. In the crafts we find: Jochanan the Sandal-maker; Daniel the Tailor; Ada the Waiter; Isaac the Smith. We are familiar with occupational surnames today, both among Jews and non-Jews: thus Smith, Taylor and Schneider; Carpenter, Becker (Baker), Shoemaker.

Nicknames also make their first appearance as a source of surnames in the Talmudic period: Hillel the Old Man; Zeira the Younger; Abba *Arecha* (the tall one); Samuel *Ha-katan* (the short one); Jose *Katanta* (the little one). The Talmud mentions a Tayfa as well as an Isaac *Sammoka* (the red), called so because of the color of their hair or complexions.

None of these surnames, however, had

the major characteristic of modern family names: transmissibility from father to son. They remained attached to the individual and were not inherited by descendants. Of all ancient names, those of kings and priests approached the notion of inherited family names most closely. The royal dynasty was called Beth David—the House of David; the priestly class was called Beth Aaron—the House of Aaron. During the Second Commonwealth, when the Davidic line had for all practical purposes disappeared politically, family names began to be perpetuated among the priesthood, where the practice caught on because of the various functions in the Temple that were the special province of certain priestly families. The Talmud (Tractate Yoma) mentions a priestly family, Beth Abtinah, the House of Abtinah, that monopolized the secret of preparing the frankincense used in the Temple; we also hear of Beth Garmo, the House of Garmo, which alone possessed the secret of baking the shewbread.

Another indication that priestly family names were transmitted is the case of the Hasmoneans, in whom the sole political leadership of Judea was vested for many generations. According to Josephus, "Hasmonean" was derived from Hasmoneus, the great-grandfather of Mattathias, and was borne by all his descendants. And so while each of the five sons of Mattathias had his own particular surname (the most famous being that of Judah which was Maccabeus), the name Hasmonean was inherited by all members of the line.

THERE were no further changes in the ways of selecting surnames for a long time after the destruction of the Jewish state in 70 C.E. In this respect the Jews remained uninfluenced by the Romans, who, among all the ancient peoples, had the most highly developed system of personal nomenclature. It was only in the 10th and 11th centuries that family names began to become more common, among Jews and non-Jews both.

There are several important reasons for this development. During this period the rise of cities, to which Jews had moved in growing numbers, was the most important immediate factor. In an urban environment it was impossible for individuals to know one another as they did in villages, and mere personal names no longer sufficed to differentiate them as before. The rise of commerce, too, necessitated a more exact system of naming. This would explain why the main impetus for the spread of surnames came from Southern Europe, particularly Venice and the other North and Central Italian cities that were centers of medieval commerce. Thus tradition has it that Jews first adopted surnames in Italy. One family, still extant in the 18th century, called itself *Adolescenti* ("the youths") and traced its descent from the captive youths brought to Rome by Titus after the fall of Jerusalem.

The custom, moreover, of naming children after deceased relatives had become pretty well entrenched among Jews by this time, and as a result, many identical personal names tended to appear in the same family, which made it necessary to add something more to a name to avoid confusion.

ALL through the Middle Ages surnames were quite common among Spanish and Portuguese Jews too, who adopted the practice from the Arabs. And second names soon made their appearance among the Sephardim of France, where, as among the other Sephardim, the patronymic type was the most popular. This was formed in various ways.

(1) The use of *ibn* (son of) replaced the Hebrew *ben* among the Arabic-speaking Jews of Spain and North Africa. The most famous examples are Ibn Akin, Ibn Verga, Ibn Ezra. (2) Another variant was simply to tack one's father's name on to one's own; this was especially common in Southern France. Bonet, the son of Abraham, became Bonet Abraham; Shlomo, the son of Vidal, became Shlomo Vidal. (3) In Spain the

paternal name, translated into the vernacular, would be used as the family name: Chabib became Caro; Zemach became Crescas, etc., etc.

Occupations also served as the source of family names. Among Spanish Jews we find Chazan (cantor), Abudraham (literally, "the father of the drachme"—a title designating the officer in charge of the mint or the collector of taxes), Atar (spice merchant), Abulafia (father of medicine), Tibbon (straw merchant). (These last three happen to be among the oldest and most illustrious of Sephardic surnames.) In Southern France there were Chalfan (money-changer), Gabbai (synagogue official), Kimchi (flour merchant); and in Italy: Dayan (rabbinic judge), Rofe (doctor), Cantarini (cantor).

Many Sephardic family names stem from nicknames based on personal or other characteristics: thus Albo (white), Bueno (good), Kassin (Hebrew *katzin*—rich), Petit (small), etc., etc.

But most surviving Sephardic family names are derived from places of origin. This practice became very widespread after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, when the names of localities were preserved, it would seem, for reasons of sentiment. Spain has given us Alcalay (from Alcala), Belmonte, Cardozo, Espinoza (whence Spinoza), Gerondi, Toledano, and so on. France is the home of Nantua and Villanova, and Italy of Porto, Trani, Montefiore, and Luria (whence the present-day Lurie).

A most interesting practice among the Jews of medieval Spain, Italy, and Southern France—particularly among those who were writers—was to form a surname by translating the name of one's place of origin into Hebrew. Thus Parchi comes from *perach*, Hebrew for "flower," and was adopted by a Jewish writer from Florenza in Spain; Yarchi comes from *yareach*, the Hebrew for "moon," and was used by a Jew of Lunel in France; Kaspi was taken from *keseif*, Hebrew for "silver," by a Jew of Argentièrre. Other surnames designated the

quarter of the city in which the bearer lived: hence Portaleone, or "Lion's gate," a section in the Roman ghetto.

A name might indicate both the occupation and place of origin of its bearer: Rofa di Porto—the doctor of Porto, Italy—was the honored leader of his community. His descendants abound today under a corrupted form of that same name: Rappaport!

AMONG the Ashkenazim in Northern Europe the story is quite different. They were more isolated from the Gentiles around them than were the Sephardim in the Mediterranean countries; their political rights were more precarious; and last but not least, they were not numerous in the larger cities. In Frankfort on the Main the Jews numbered only seven hundred in the 14th century, and there were only about twelve hundred Jews in Prague as late as the 16th. Members of communities of this size usually knew one another quite intimately, so there was little need for surnames. In official registers, the surname "the Jew" was generally added to the first name, and that was all. In the Jewish records themselves we find as names, besides the common patronymic forms, a prevalence of places of origin: Ephraim of Bonn, Meir of Ruthenberg, Yom Tob of York, Petachiah of Regensburg, Yechiel of Paris, and so on.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, we come across some family names that already wear their modern forms—that is, the designating preposition is omitted: thus Moysse Tannenbach, and Gabriel Treviess, both of which second names are based on places of origin. In patronymics we find a Jeckli the son of Jolieb referred to as Jeckli Joliebes.

Though the development of surnames among the Ashkenazi Jews followed patterns similar to those of their Gentile neighbors, there was one basic difference: the Crusades and the subsequent rise of commerce may have provided the impetus for an increase of family names among Christians, but the progress of the Crusaders themselves through France, Germany, and Bohemia

brought great suffering and political degradation to the Jewish communities there. And with the deterioration of their political and social status, the spread of family names among the Jews was arrested—as if such names, or the need for them, were a concomitant of material and social advancement. And the increasing isolation of the Jews of Western and Central Europe, in the late Middle Ages and during the Reformation, from the centers of life around them seems to have continued to keep their need for distinctive names low.

Jewish birth records were not kept in most places during the Middle Ages. Even where they were, the fortunes of the community were usually such that they were either lost or destroyed. Inscriptions on tombstones provided a more permanent record, and these show us that family names were rather exceptional among Ashkenazi Jews before the late 18th century: that is, as long as they were left free to choose them of their own accord. The few choices they did make, however, set a number of precedents that were followed later on, when they were compelled by law to adopt second names.

One of the most important developments in the history of Jewish family names took place in Frankfort on the Main, where the Jews were compelled to live in a special section called the Judengasse, and families were registered according to the houses they occupied, the right to live there being closely tied up with the ownership of one's house.

In medieval German cities, as elsewhere in Europe, houses were not numbered; few people then could read letters or numbers anyhow. It was therefore the custom in most places to identify a house by a sign hung outside. These colorful and picturesque house signs seem to have had a particular attraction for Jews; no matter how far the Jew had traveled from his original house in Frankfort, he still valued its memory. So strong, in fact, was the love of the Jews for their house signs that they became part of family tradition and, like their forefathers in the days of the Roman Caesars

who put signs in the catacombs, the Jews of Frankfort and Prague carved house signs on their gravestones.

The rationalizing French introduced the practice of numbering houses, and by the end of the 18th century house signs had all but disappeared in Germany. When, in 1776, the houses in Frankfort's Judengasse were ordered to be numbered, there was such bitter resistance that the city council fined the whole Jewish community. This is all the more significant because there is no evidence of any Gentile community shedding tears at the passing of its house signs. (Perhaps no other people in pre-19th-century Europe were so conservative fundamentally as the Jews, who tended to make habitual usage sacred usage.) It is therefore small wonder that so many house signs found their way into Jewish family names from the 16th century on.

At first, house signs were illustrations of the owner's name. Thus the house of a Jew known as Wolf would be called "zum Wolf,"—"at Wolf's," and its sign would bear a picture of a wolf and the house itself be designated "At the Sign of the Wolf." To this day European hotels, inns, and pubs use such signs, and they were also common in Colonial America. Many German Jewish first names which had been taken from animals lent themselves very well to pictorial representation, and so we find homes with such designations as: "At the Sign of the Gans (goose)"; "At the Sign of the Baer (bear)"; "At the Sign of the Loeb (lion)." All these animal names, it must be remembered, were first names.

Sometimes a slight modification had to be made in order to represent the house owner's name by a picture. The diminutive of Isaac was commonly "Seckl." If a house-owner was named Isaac, he would have a sickle painted on his house sign, feeling that *Sickel*—the German for "sickle"—could easily stand for "Seckl." In the same way the figure of a blackbird (*Amsel*) adorned the houses of Jews called Amschel—which is a corrupted form of Anselm.

But not all personal names could be repre-

sented by pictures. In such cases Jews often borrowed from the house signs of Gentile neighbors. These borrowings likewise were eventually incorporated into family names and are still extant: thus Strauss (either ostrich or flower bouquet), Taube (dove), Apfel (apple), Birnbaum (pear tree), Gruenbaum (green tree), Nussbaum (nut tree), Rothschild (red house-shield), Stern (star), Engel (angel), and so on.

One family in Frankfort that was of priestly descent and known as Cahn took for its house sign the picture of a boat (*Kahn* is the German for "boat"). Later, other members of the same family used the sign of a ship—*Schiff*—so that what was originally the Hebrew Kahn became the German Schiff.

Those who bear the family name Elefant or Elfand (Slavic: Gelfand) will be interested to discover that house signs have been found showing that what our forefathers called "elephant" was represented by the picture of a camel!

THROUGHOUT the Middle Ages, as we have seen, the Jews relied greatly on patronymics for family names. The name of the scholar Moses Isserles is an example: Isserles is a genitive form of Isserl, which was used as a diminutive of Israel. Other names of the same kind are Fishels, Moscheles, Sanders.

Since women were often the breadwinners, many famous Ashkenazim bore as surnames the names of their mothers or other female members of their family: Samuel Eidels, Joel Sirkes (Sirke being a diminutive of Sarah), Moshe Rivkes, Elijah Pessels, Zvi Chayes, etc., etc. Names denoting personal characteristics appear now and then: Klein (small), Lang (long), Jaffe (beautiful), Schwartz (dark or black), and so forth.

Some Jewish last names throw light on historical facts of great interest. For example, the common notion that medieval Jews were exclusively engaged in money-lending can be refuted by the fact that surnames such as Arzt (doctor), Becker (baker), Metzger

(butcher), Schreiner (cabinet-maker), and Schneider (tailor) survive from before the 15th century. Other occupations appear as family names either in German or Hebrew: Apotheker and Rokeach (druggist), Schreiber and Sofer (secretary or letter-writer), Richter and Dayan (rabbinic judge), Lehrer and Melamed (teacher).

However, most Jewish surnames in the Middle Ages derive from places of origin, with every part of Europe being represented, often in corrupted form. Alsatian Jews coming to Germany were dubbed *Welsch* or *der Welsche* meaning "foreign." When these Jews, driven by persecution, migrated to Poland, *Welsch* became Wallack, Wallach, or Wloch, which, when their bearers re-migrated to Germany, became Block.

Jewish last names formed from abbreviations—a practice never followed by Gentiles—were derived from the initials of a first name and patronymic as well as from places of origin. Such names were usually conferred on great masters of learning: thus Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki), Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon), Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gerson), and Rashal (Rabbi Shlomo Luria). Among the curious abbreviations derived from places of origin is Ash from Altshule, the old synagogue of Prague, or from Aisenshtadt. Other abbreviations commemorate a special event in the life of the family: Bak, from *B'ne K'doshim*, "children of martyrs"; Sak from *Sera K'doshim Spiro*, "descendants of the martyrs of Speyer."

BEFORE leaving the Middle Ages, several observations ought to be made. In our day, the last name is more important than the first: Doe distinguishes John Doe from most of the rest of the world, and John only distinguishes him from other Does. In the Middle Ages, however, the surname served only to help along the personal name in its identifying function: Doe distinguished John Doe from all the other Johns. The primacy of the medieval first name can be discerned in the fact that the monogram of Albrecht Dürer, the famous German

painter of the 16th century, consisted of a capital "A" and a small "D." Similarly in the works of the *paiytanim* (the composers of Hebrew liturgic poetry), who sometimes signed their poems by forming an anagram of their names from the initial letter of each line, it is the first name that is honored in the great majority of cases.

Another sign of the slight regard medieval Jews had for their family names was the ease with which they themselves, or other people, changed them. A name denoting a place of origin might be altered simply because its bearer had moved. Joel Herlingen (Herlingen was the residence of his father) was also called Joel Stein (Stein being his own place of residence).

But the various surnames attached to one and the same Jew can also be attributed to the habit of using both a religious and a secular first name. The same was true of surnames: a Jew sometimes had one name in the Jewish community and another for civic and business purposes. Simon Heine, the great grandfather of Heinrich Heine, was also called Simon Bueckeburg, having come from that place. The philosopher Moses Mendelssohn was sometimes called Moses Dessauer because he came from Dessauer.

A classic example of multiple naming is Moses Schuster Kahn, who was also known as Moses Spanier Kahn and Moses Frosch Spanier. Schuster is an occupational surname, denoting that he was a cobbler by trade; the name Kahn tells us that he was of priestly lineage; Spanier identifies him as having originally come from Spain; Frosch is from a house sign, indicating that either Moses or his forefathers once lived in a house marked "At the Sign of the Frog."

This disorganized state of affairs as regards Jewish family names created great difficulties for government authorities, and so, when the German states undertook to "emancipate" the Jews at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, they made an effort to regularize Jewish family names by requiring them to adopt fixed and permanent ones. (At the same time use of the Hebrew

language in their business transactions was prohibited.)

In 1797 Emperor Joseph II promulgated an edict ordering the Jews of Galicia and Bucovina to assume permanent family names. Similar edicts were passed in Frankfurt in 1807 and in Baden in 1809. And Napoleon's proclamations of Jewish emancipation in France, Hesse, and Westphalia in 1808 were accompanied by laws requiring the adoption of permanent family names. Prussia followed suit in 1812, Bavaria in 1813, and Saxony in 1834. In 1845 the Jews of the Russian empire were likewise compelled to take fixed family names.

These new regulations were intended, above all, to serve several practical ends for the governments concerned. The levying of taxes would be expedited by fixed surnames, and so would the conscription of Jewish soldiers. But here was also an opportunity to Westernize, "civilize," and assimilate the Jew. To many an "enlightened" Jew himself, the adoption of a family name looked to be one more asset in the struggle to secure equal rights and integrate oneself in the Gentile world.

MOST Jews, however, resisted the adoption of fixed family names—again, out of an ingrained conservatism. In many places, the edicts had to be enforced over and over again. Meanwhile, for the government officials in charge, the granting and registering of names proved a new way of extorting money from Jews. Fine-sounding names came at a high price, while those who could not afford to pay were stuck with names like Salz (salt), Schmalz (grease), Nierenstein (kidney stone), and Garfinkel (carbuncle). Just as the use of Hebrew in business transactions was prohibited, so an attempt was made to eliminate all Hebrew elements from names and render their form as "German" as possible. This led to the prohibition of Biblical names, but the prohibition was not strictly enforced, and Jews managed in many cases to evade it.

Where Jews could manage by some device or other to escape the interference

of the authorities and choose their own names, they resorted to several methods. When the deadline finally came, many who had delayed opened the Bible at random and chose the first name they could find. We know of one congregation that assembled in the synagogue at the direction of its rabbi, who then opened the prayer book and assigned the first word on the page to the first family, the following word to the second family, and so on down the line. In some cases names were simply invented out of whole cloth; in others they were taken from characters in the popular literature of the day (Sternberg, Morgenthau).

But a more popular procedure still was to draw on the tribal lineage of the family. Those who were descended from the priestly caste (*kohanim*) became Cohen, Kahn, and Katz (the latter an abbreviation for *kohen tzedek*, "priest of righteousness")—or, in Slavic countries, where there was no "h" sound, Kogen, Kagan, and Kaplan (the last meaning "descended from priests"). Those of Levitic descent became Levy, Levin, Levinsky, Levitan, Levitt, Levitsky, and Segal (the latter an abbreviation for *s'gan leviah*: "member of the Levites"). Some of the authorities, however, frowned upon these Hebraisms and insisted that Germanic forms be used. Hence we get a bizarre assortment of Hebrew-German combinations: Aronstein, Katzmann, Levinthal, and so forth.

Another method was to make the secular first name or *kinnuy*, which could easily be adapted to the vernacular, into the family name. Sometimes a corrupted or diminutive form of the Hebrew or Yiddish first name would do for a surname: e.g. Baruch Bendit, Jacob Koppelman. Often the Hebrew first name was simply translated into the vernacular: thus Solomon Friedman.

Such translations were made in every language. For example, Wolf, the *kinnuy* of Benjamin, appeared as the Slavic Wilk. In the same way Naphtali, for which the *kinnuy* Herz (hart) was used as a family name, was translated by French Jews into Cerf, while in Slavic countries it became

Yellin or Yellinik. (Herz, incidentally, is the root of several names—Herzbach, Herzbrunn, Herzfeld, Herzberg.) The suffixes were added either for the sheer sake of embellishment or to distinguish one name clearly from another.

The simplest way of choosing a family name was to create a patronym. Among Austrian and German Jews this was done with the suffix *-sohn*, and among Slavic Jews with the suffix *-vitch*: hence Mendelsohn, Mendelovitch; Abramsohn, Abramovitch; Isaacsohn, Isaakovitch. Jews in Slavic countries also used the suffixes *-ov*, *-off*, *-eff*, and *-kin* to denote "descendant of," and to this day we find a host of matronymics and patronymics built on this principle: Baskin, Barkin, Chaikin, Rivkin, Sorkin, Malkov, Aronoff.

In Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire, the mother's name rather than the father's very often served as the basis of a surname: Sarassohn, Zirelsohn, Breines, Beiles, Gitles, Reines, Zeldes, Perles. And frequently a man would forsake both his parents to go with his wife: Dienesmann (husband of Dinah), Estermann (husband of Esther), Hodesmann (husband of Hadasah), Perlmann (husband of Perl). Sometimes, however, it was possible to make a German-sounding name out of the initials of the Hebrew patronymic, so that many a *ben* Baruch became Bab, while *ben* Chaim could emerge as Bach, and *ben* Rab Nathan as Brann.

Occupations, of course, became an important source of derivation among the Ashkenazim when it came to the formation of new surnames: Becker (baker), Fleischer (butcher), Breuer (brewer), Weber (weaver), Farber (painter), Goldschmidt (goldsmith), Kramer (merchant), Wechsler (money-changer), Ackermann (farmer), Brenner (distiller), Gerber (tanner). Hundreds of other examples could be cited, and when we consider that the same principle was followed by Jews living in many different language areas, we get some idea of the vast number of occupational names.

This category, incidentally, is even wider

than might be suspected at first, for occupational names were now and then taken from the material worked with or from the tools of the trade. Thus a tanner might call himself Leder (leather), and a tailor would become Seidenfaden (silk thread), Fingerhut (thimble), Nadel (needle), or Scher (shears). A carpenter might choose to be a Nagel (nail); a cook, Ribeisen (grater); or a maid, Biegeleisen (flat-iron).

All occupations, professions, and crafts, from the most homely to the most exalted, are represented among Jewish family names. There are, for example, a whole range of names deriving from religious occupations: thus Rabad (an abbreviation of *resh av beth din*, head of a rabbinic court) and the Slavic Ravidovitch; Babad (*ben av beth din*, son of a rabbi), and Rabinovitch, Schulman, and Shkolnick. The cantorate provided Kantor, Singer, Schatz (abbreviation for *shliach tzibbur*, "representative of the congregation") and Schen (abbreviation of *shliach ne-emon*, "faithful representative"). From the profession of ritual slaughterer came Shechter, Shochet, Bodek (inspector of animals), Resnick (Slavic for *shochet*), and Shub (abbreviation for *shochet u-bodek*—slaughterer and inspector).

PERSONALITY and physical characteristics, as we have seen, had always been a source of informal Jewish surnames (and of non-Jewish as well: Richard the Lion-Hearted, Charles the Wise, Frederick Barbarossa—i.e., of the red beard). It was to be expected, therefore, that many Jews would adopt surnames of this type when the new laws came into effect. Names like Kurtz (short), Stark (strong), Schnell (fast), Gross (big) are common examples. We also find a large group of names determined by the color of one's hair: Schwartz (Slavic: Chorney) for black, Weiss (Slavic: Bialik) for white, Roth (red), Braun (brown), Gelber or Geller (yellow), Kraushaar (curly hair), Graubart (gray beard).

Some Jews simply registered the nicknames by which they were known in the Jewish community with the local authorities.

Sometimes, however, it took a full purse to persuade the civil magistrate to agree; complimentary names like Ehrlich (honest), Kluger (wise), or Frohlich and Lustig (happy) came at a high price. One group of family names was supplied by the days of the week as well as by seasons—Frühling (spring), Sommer (summer), Sonntag (Sunday), Dienstag (Tuesday)—referring presumably to the time of birth or, perhaps, to the occasion on which the name was officially registered.

However, most Ashkenazi family names, like those of the Sephardim, point to places of origin, and so we find innumerable provinces, cities, villages, and hamlets all over Germany, Austria, Poland, western Russia, Hungary, and other countries represented among extant Jewish surnames.

Some of the most popular place names are: Auerbach, Bachrach, Bamberger, Bernstein, Brody, Dreyfuss (Alsatian corruption of Trier or Troyes), Dresner (Dresden), Epstein, Florsheim, Ginzberg, Wiener, Weil, Landau, Spiro (Spayer from Speyer, whence also Shapiro), Lemberger, Lasker, Kalischer, Ellbogen, Horowitz (Slavic: Gurovitz), Gumbiner, Schwab, Schlesinger, Frank, Posner, Pollack, Litauer, and so on.

Several interesting historical details are involved in Jewish place names. Nürnberg, for example, is seldom found as a Jewish name, while Fürth, a suburb of Nürnberg, is quite common, as is the variant Further. Having been expelled from Nürnberg in 1499, Jews were permitted to spend only the day in that city if they had business there; at dusk they had to return to Fürth.

It isn't always easy to determine offhand whether a particular name stems from a town or not. Thus Steinberg and Goldberg happen to be names of real places, but Levinstein and Aronthal are inventions. Nor need the possession of a place name mean that the bearer actually was a resident of the place designated. Many Jews called Moses selected the place name Mosbach because of its phonetic rather than geographic connection.

Adler (eagle), Blum (flower), Buxbaum

(box tree), Fisch, Hecht (pike), and Karp are all house-sign names. There is a particularly interesting history behind the name Adler. The legendary phoenix, which was said to be reborn out of its own ashes, was identified, on the basis of Psalms 103:5, with the eagle as the symbol of Jewish survival, and this made it popular as a house sign and then as a surname. House signs also are behind the prevalence of fish in Jewish family names: i.e. Lachs (salmon), Hecht (pike), Carp or Carpeles. But the fish can be traced to other seas as well. Jewish inhabitants of the city of Ryback (meaning "place of fishes") called themselves by the names of actual fish! Many whose first name was Ephraim used the *kinnuy* Fischel as a family name because in the Bible Jacob told Ephraim that his seed would multiply as the fish in the sea (Genesis 48:16). But some Ephraims fancifully substituted the names of specific fish. There were Jonahs who adopted names of fish because of the story of the whale, and there were Joshuas who did likewise because the Biblical Joshua was the son of Nun (*nun* being the Hebrew for fish).

But the many Jewish surnames taken from flowers, plants, and gems cannot be attributed to house signs alone. They were popular because they were considered beautiful, and for names so considered the officials in charge of registration exacted the highest prices. The first Mandelbaums, Rosenbaums, Weinstocks, Perlmutter, Diamonds, and Rubinsteins paid a good penny for their fancy names.

A GREAT number of the names discussed so far are preserved among American Jews, either in their original forms, or in versions slightly altered by immigration officials who could not spell or pronounce them properly. Other changes* have come about as a result of the general tendency to Americanize—or rather, Anglicize—the form and spelling of foreign-sounding surnames

*See J. Alvin Kugelmass's "Name-Changing—and What It Gets You" in COMMENTARY for August 1952.—ED.

among Jews and Gentiles alike. A common procedure has been to translate the European word into English (so that Goldschmidt becomes Goldsmith; Schoenkind, Fairchild, and so on), or simply to shorten the name: Fleischhacker to Fleisher, Mandelstamm to Mandel, Freidenthal to Fried.

Often the European element is completely expunged, with a purely American form emerging: Steinschneider becomes Stone; Finkelstein, Finch; Moskowitz, Moss; Kalisch, Cole. In most cases, the initial letter of the old name is retained as the basis of the new one.

But it is in Israel rather than America that Jewish surnames have undergone a total revolution of late. Israelis have been Hebraizing their names at a feverish rate, as though the taking on of a new name in a new land were of itself an act of spiritual rebirth.

In a series of articles appearing in the Hebrew monthly *Bitzaron*, Dr. Mordecai Kosover pointed out that the practice of Hebraizing surnames began sporadically among the early *halutzim*. It was in this early period that Eliezer Perlman, the great lexicographer, became Ben Yehudah, while David Green of Poland became David Ben Gurion of Palestine, and Isaac Shimshelevitz reappeared as Isaac Ben Zvi, later to be elected president of Israel.

AFTER a slow start, name-changing was stepped up considerably under the British Mandate as a result of pressure from Zionist leaders who wished to give Palestine a "Hebrew appearance." Another factor was the adoption of secret names by members of the Haganah; with the achievement of independence these names were retained—just as the cover names assumed by Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries in Czarist Russia eventually became public and permanent. Even while the Arab-Israeli war was still on, a pamphlet was circulated among members of the Israeli armed forces calling upon them to discard their foreign names and choose Hebrew ones. After the war, Moshe Shertok became Sharett; Berlin was changed to Bar-Ilan; Elath was derived from Epstein,

Agron from Agronsky, Granot from Granovsky, and Eshkol from Shkolnick.

The establishment of the state gave a tremendous impetus to the Hebraizing process, and in the first year of independence, seventeen thousand men and women changed their original names for Hebrew ones. The rush was so great that the Department of Immigration had to establish a special office for the purpose of speeding up the legal machinery of name-changing.

Names continue to be changed in Israel today, both among old settlers and new arrivals, and the government still publishes special lists every week to announce the changes that have been registered.

Some Israelis, particularly those with some first-hand experience of the European holocaust, have resisted the trend to rid all names of Diasporic influence, feeling that perpetuation of the old names is a way of keeping the memory of a cherished past alive. But they are in a small minority, and the Hebraizing process goes on apace, encouraged by a government which feels that the sooner every Israeli has a Hebrew name the more quickly will cultural and national homogeneity be achieved. No direct legislative pressure is being applied, but writers satirize Diaspora names and people ridicule them in conversation. They are held to smack too much of the humiliations of a past that many Israelis are only too eager to forget. The result is a psychological climate that works for the complete eradication of "Jewish" second names.*

The sources for the new Hebrew names, both personal and surnames, are the Bible, the Talmud, and Midrashic literature. Those individuals who cannot find names on their own come for help to the Board of Names, which is part of the Board of Language. Most of the new names are short, of one or two syllables, and most are Hebrew, though some Aramaic forms have been used.

Dr. Kosover has made a study of some four thousand Israeli family names involv-

*Even Golda Meyerson had to become "Meir" when she was recently appointed Foreign Minister of Israel.

ing about twenty thousand persons, and has found several definite patterns in the way in which they have been Hebraized. Occasionally an effort is made to preserve some phonetic element of the old name: thus Orenstein becomes Oren; Lubarsky, Bar; Goldenberg, Golon; Greenblatt, Goren; Dorfman, Doron; Osovsky, Asaf; Zokovsky, Zakai. The same purpose is achieved in other cases by transposition—Biber emerges as Rabib and Brodner gets transformed into Bendor—or by the substitution of Hebrew suffixes for Slavic and Germanic ones, Aronowitch becoming Aroni, and Wolfsohn, Z'evi.

Foreign patronymics are frequently replaced with Semitic forms by using the Hebrew *ben*, the Arabic *ibn*, or the Aramaic *bar*: thus ben Zvi, ibn Zahav, bar Droma. The Hebrew prefixes *avi-* (father of) and *achi-* (brother of) have come into widespread use, as has the suffix *-el* (Avidor, Achiasaf, Gadiel). But the most popular method has been to translate either the whole or part of the old name into Hebrew: Birnbaum thereby becomes Agosi (*Birn* and *agos* both mean "pear"); Nussbaum, Agozi (*Nuss* and *agoz* both mean "nut"); and Rosenbaum, Vardi (*Rosen* and *vard* both mean "rose").

Fisher and Riback similarly become Dayag (which is Hebrew for "fisher"); Kovalsky and Kuznitsky become Naphcha (the Aramaic for "smith"); Novick becomes Chodosh (new); Wexler becomes Chalfan (money-changer); Jung becomes Elem (young); Recht becomes Amiti (honest); Lempert becomes Lavi (leopard); Adler becomes Nesher (eagle); Silver becomes Kaspi (silver); Schild is changed to Mogen (shield).

There is a certain poetic justice in the attempts some Israelis have made to rectify the wrongs done more than a century ago to their forefathers by Austrian and German officials: Inkdiger (*hinkediger* meaning "lame") has been changed to Adir (strong); Alter (old) becomes Abrech (young); Ungluck (misfortune) has been transformed

to Osher (fortune), and Lugner (liar) to Amiti (man of truth).

NAMES expressing the emotions and sentiments of the new era that has begun with the state have also been popular choices. These names are built on roots like *dror* and *cheruth* (both meaning freedom), *am* (people), and *tzur* (rock). Among the results are: Drori, Lidror, Cheruthi, Amichai, Amikom, Elitzur. Another kind of expressive name harks back to the disaster in Europe which preceded the birth of Israel: Nanod (wanderer), Sordid (refugee), Gal-mud (lonely).

About 65 per cent of the surnames received originally by German Jews are of geographic origin, and roughly the same proportion holds for East European Jews. In Israel too, place names are common, but these have nothing to do with their bearers' places of origin. For example, the name Ophir does not mean that its bearer, or an ancestor of his, comes from the southwest of the Arabian peninsula where Solomon got his gold; what has happened is that people once called Goldberg, Goldman, or Zolotov-sky have taken the name of Ophir simply because of its association with the idea of gold.

Not all changes of name in Israel are from non-Hebrew into Hebrew forms. Some Israelis who had Hebrew names in the first place have assumed new ones; some non-Hebrew names have been changed to new non-Hebrew ones. And there are even some cases of Hebrew names becoming non-Hebrew ones in Israel.

One gets the feeling that the process going on in Israel is an attempt to correct a wrong done to Jews in Eastern and Central Europe over a century ago. The new family names in Israel may still not fit perfectly, but they have at least helped wipe out some of the painful associations. Artificial though it appears, the style of naming in Israel may serve as new skin to cover the blemishes and heal the scars of years gone by.